

Introduction

This report presents an overview of the outcomes from the DARYA regional seminar held in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, 15-17 October 2024 in the framework of the EU project “[DARYA](#)”. 70 participants from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, representing national authorities in the field of education, training and employment, methodological institutes, national qualifications bodies, sectoral and employer organisations, businesses, and international partners took part. Participants from Central Asia discussed and projected a scenario of regional cooperation on skills and qualifications in Central Asia.

Background

The event built on the results of [DARYA regional feasibility study](#) that researched on the ongoing economic, political and social cooperation in Central Asia. The results show an increase in intraregional trade and multicountry sectoral collaboration, intensification of political will in the region to unpack the regional potential and identity. Focus group discussions with Central Asian stakeholders identified a willingness to intensify collaboration and transparency of skills and qualifications. Based on these findings, the study developed 4 possible scenarios of cooperation, with different levels of intensity. They were proposed to stakeholders at the Bishkek event: for discussion, prioritisation and projection of a long term sustainable cooperation. The methods utilised for collective projection of cooperation were: discussions in regional groups, regional discussions in world café formats, individual voting. The projected cooperation scenario is described below. It includes the following elements:

- Title,
- Objective,
- Activities
- 8 operational dimensions: benefits, implementors, coordination and decision making, outcomes and milestones, information sharing, common principles and procedures, financing and resources, risks

Title: Integration in the area of skills and qualifications

Objective: Integration of national qualification systems of Central Asian countries into a single, comprehensive system, recognized and highly valued both at the regional and international levels

Activities of regional cooperation:

Sharing existing info and peer learning:

- Exchange information in the field of standards and qualifications
- Compare and exchange good practices
- Online exchange of methodical materials and educational resources
- Creation of a regional social network for regional interaction and resource exchange (standards, qualifications, educational resources, methodological documents, legislative texts)

Jointly creating new skills

Jointly developed and applied resources

- o Development of regional portal on labour market data
- o Development of common qualification or occupational profiles, curricula
- o Development and connecting national databases of occupational standards and qualifications into a regional database

Integration of systems

- Creation of regional quality assurance reference system
- Development of regional qualification framework
- Creation of mechanisms for mutual recognition of educational and occupational qualifications

8 operational dimensions

- 1. Benefits.** Stakeholders identified benefits that regional cooperation will bring to the Central Asia region and to each country, differentiating by target group.

Summary

Regional cooperation offers significant benefits, such as fostering a cohesive qualification framework, improving labor mobility, and enhancing workforce competencies. Such collaboration would promote sustainable economic growth by addressing shared skills gaps, supporting regional industries, and aligning qualification standards with international benchmarks.

One primary benefit is the promotion of **economic development**. Aligning professional qualifications across countries leads to increased **job creation** and improved **employment opportunities**. A harmonized labor market allows workers to move freely across borders, optimizing workforce allocation and addressing labor shortages, which in turn attracts foreign investment and stimulates growth.

Additionally, regional cooperation enhances **human capital**. Shared training programs and recognized qualifications provide individuals access to better education and skills development, resulting in a **qualified workforce** that meets evolving job market demands. Unified certification mechanisms ensure skills recognition across borders, facilitating career advancement and continuous learning.

Social integration is another key benefit. Harmonizing labor conditions promotes a supportive environment for workers, ensuring **decent work** with fair wages and safe conditions. This collaboration fosters a **shared identity** among Central Asian nations, enhancing cultural ties and mutual understanding.

In the educational sphere, regional cooperation improves **quality and relevance**. Collaborating with international organizations allows countries to adopt best practices in vocational training, establishing a **common framework for professional standards** aligned with labor market needs. Shared resources and expertise enhance training institutions, promoting academic mobility and knowledge exchange.

Finally, regional cooperation stimulates **innovation and technological advancement** in the business sector. By facilitating access to new technologies and fostering partnerships, companies can boost productivity and competitiveness, fostering a culture of innovation essential for thriving in a rapidly changing global economy.

Detailed report from group works

Benefits for all countries & all beneficiaries:

- economic development, human development , integration with other countries
- sustainable development

- new jobs
- accessibility of professions, education and personal development opportunities, upskilling opportunities
- mechanisms enabling recognition of qualifications

Benefits for business:

- access to information about new technologies, innovations,
- increasing productivity
- qualified personnel
- reducing the time it takes to find a worker
- improving the qualifications of an employee through “on the job” learning, without interruption of production process
- opportunities to attract personnel from other countries of the region
- stimulation and motivation of the business sector (tax preferences) within the framework of regional integration
- increasing business competitiveness
- search and establishment of partnerships across the region, including with businesses, public-private partnerships, attracting investments from international partners
- collaboration and harmonisation of qualifications at regional sectoral level

Benefits for workers:

- Harmonization of working conditions, favorable environment for the employee at the regional level: decent work at the regional level (ensuring safety conditions, harmonizing wages, decent wages, social and psychological services)
- opportunities for career growth and getting new skills, access to qualifications and upskilling for in-demand occupations at the regional level,
- harmonized system for acquiring qualifications/certification, recognition of competences in Central Asian countries (if there is no certification center in the country, an employee can obtain confirmation in another Central Asian country)
- increasing mobility at the regional level
- access to regionally integrated services: career guidance, vacancy database, labor market information database, digital platform for online or remote work (especially for the urban population)

Benefits for education and training system:

- cooperation with Asia Skills , Euroskills , worldskills

- improving quality of education and training, support for curriculum reforms
- better linking educational offer with the labor market demand
- definition of common key competences at regional level
- academic mobility,
- regional recognition of diplomas
- creation of new and unified educational standards and programs that meet the changing conditions and needs of the labor market

Benefits for government agencies:

- new opportunities for regional economic development, technology exchange, labor force distribution,
- the emergence of new opportunities for cooperation
- opportunities for staff development and exchange
- labor force exchange , redirection of personnel to reduce social tension in the labor market
- cooperation between employment services for better employment opportunities, regulation of internal and external migration, circular migration,
- privatization of public services
- harmonized system for acquiring qualifications/certification, recognition of competences in Central Asian countries (if there is no certification center in the country, an employee can obtain confirmation in another Central Asian country)
- cultural and social rapprochement of the peoples of Central Asia, and later with the peoples of the Caucasus

2. Implementors. Stakeholders at the event discussed which implementing agencies need to be mobilized, what their different roles and responsibilities are, and if we can make reference to existing functions of existing institutions. They discussed how to ensure that people are competent and that there are enough people to carry out the responsibilities.

Summary

The roles and responsibilities of various institutions were outlined by participants:

- **Regional Coordination Council and Secretariat:** Leading regional qualification initiatives and maintaining cooperation platforms.
- **Sectoral Ministries and National Qualification Councils:** Overseeing policy and financial support.

- **Labor and Education Ministries and equivalent institutions:** Managing labor market data and coordinating educational programs.
- **Employer Associations and Sectoral Agencies:** Collaborating on cross-border standards and skill development.

The importance of ensuring adequate staffing and expertise was underscored, with suggestions for regional training and mentorship programs, along with a database of certified experts for consistent quality and knowledge sharing.

Detailed report from group works

Institutions

Ministries of Education and Labor, employers' associations, educational organizations, educational institutions, state agencies, education quality inspections, certification and validation centers, trade unions, media institutions

Roles and Responsibilities

- Cabinets of Ministers – creation of a platform/institution for integration, control and coordination of the process, development of a common policy/strategy for integration of the Central Asian region
- Industry/line ministries - financing - strong-willed participation of all interested parties
- Ministries of Labor - coordination of the development of methodology for national occupational standards, coordination of the collection and analysis of data on the labor market
- Ministries of Education (and equivalent institutions) - coordination of the work of educational organizations and certification centers,
- Employers' associations/business structures – participation in the development of common/ multicountry occupational standards
- National sectoral agencies - development of multicountry standards, consulting,
- Education quality inspections, Certification and Validation Centers - development of a methodology for recognition of qualifications and competencies between countries, creation of a unified assessment base and infrastructure
- Trade unions – participation in the development of national standards in the field of labor protection
- Media institutions – popularization and information,

- Independent scientific research institutes - providing methodological support for the development of methodologies for multicountry standards and recognition /awarding of qualifications
- National and sectoral councils for vocational qualifications - implementation of a regional qualifications framework
- Scientific and methodological centers – development of a regional qualifications framework

Above list is to be optimised and key implementors and coordinators are to be defined with related responsibilities: regional coordination council, regional monitoring and analysis center / regional secretariat

Competence and sufficiency of experts

- Organization of systematic training of experts in all countries, organization of multicountry certification of experts
- Creation of a regional and national databases of certified experts on the regional portal
- Attracting new experts, including international experts
- Organization of joint internships of experts
- Multicountry coaching of experts, transfer of best practices

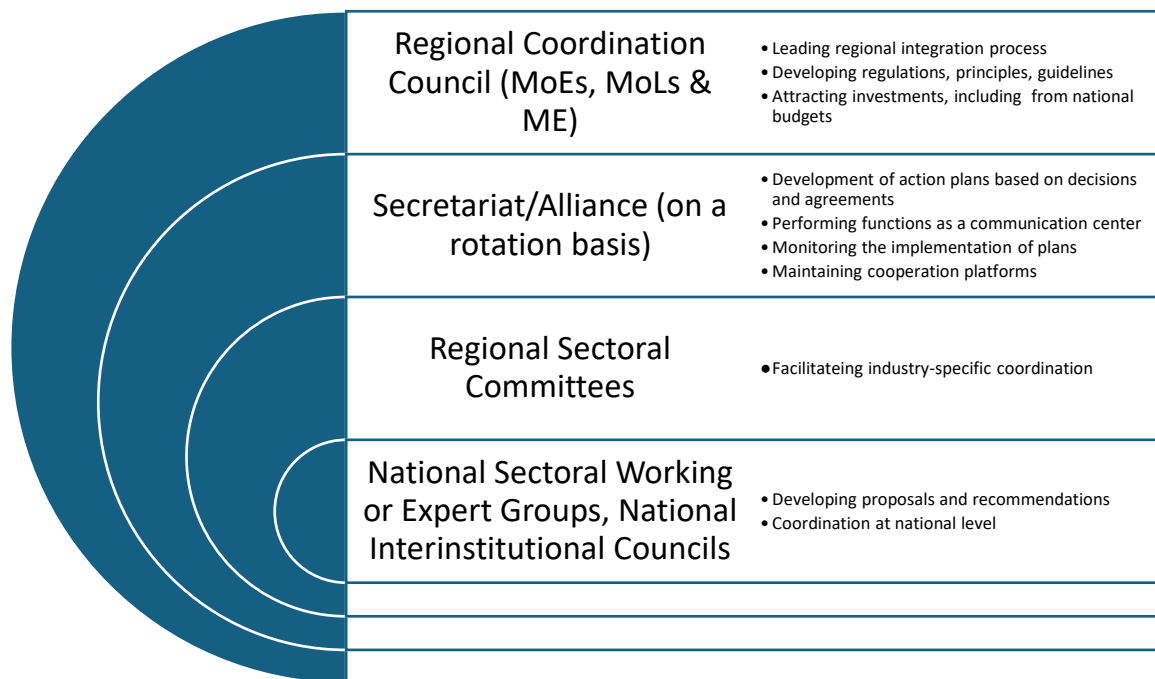
3. Coordination and decision-making. Stakeholders discussed how to ensure coordination, what mechanisms should be put in place, as well as on decision-makers and decision-making procedures.

Summary

To foster effective regional cooperation in professional qualifications, a structured framework of coordination and collaboration at both national and sectoral levels is essential. A centralized intergovernmental structure – Regional Coordination Council - involving education, labor, and economic ministries was recommended. A permanent Secretariat was proposed, potentially on a rotating basis, to serve as a central coordinating and communication hub. Decision-making processes should include annual meetings of key stakeholders and a digital platform for real-time data sharing and progress tracking. Regional Sectoral Committees to facilitate industry-specific coordination were also suggested. At

national level, Interagency national councils for streamlined communication and strategy alignment.

Together, these entities ensure that strategic objectives are aligned and decisions are harmonized across the Central Asian region, supporting consistent and sustainable development in workforce qualifications and standards. Therefore, suggested coordination mechanisms should include:



Detailed report from group works

How to ensure coordination ?

- Creation of an intergovernmental structure at the level of ministries (key ones are those responsible for the development of education, the labor market, the economy) with role of adoption of agreed agreements at the regional level, and regular meetings;
- Secretariat (Alliance) with role of development of action plans based on agreements, role of communication center; control over the implementation of plans
- Organisation of annual forums
- Regional sectoral committees
- National Interinstitutional Councils
- National Expert Groups
- Research institutes

- Creation of an information and communication platform
- Approval of long-term and operational plans, external and internal monitoring
- Agreed glossaries framework normative documents

Operational considerations

- Need to create mechanisms to make decisions and solve conflicting issues, for example majority of votes
- Taking into account the possibilities of compromise solutions
- Representation of all countries
- Secretariat with rotation by alphabet, frequency is once every 3 years
- Regional sectoral committees can have base in different countries

4. Results and milestones. Stakeholders discussed the main stages of implementation (up to 2027, mid-term 2027-2035 , long-term 2035-2050) and the expected results associated with them.

Summary

The implementation roadmap and its key stages are summarised in the Diagram

Up to 2027

- Sign a political agreement among CA governments;
- Establish a pilot IT platform with databases on qualifications, occupations, jobs, and educational programs;
- Create expert councils in each country.
- Launch a regional coordination body
- Prepare a roadmap with indicators for regional cooperation
- Pilot regional qualification frameworks, standards, educational standards and curricula
- Initiate annual forums and reports on National Qualification Systems (NQS)

2027-2035

- Strengthen the IT platform
- ensure recognition of a regional qualifications framework, and include neighboring countries in the regional system.
- Ongoing work of regular forums, an external monitoring center, and a labor market analysis center

2035-2050

- Achieve mutual professional recognition across CA countries,
- Establish a sustainable, internationally recognized regional qualifications system
- Complete a comprehensive evaluation of cooperation efforts.

Ongoing monitoring and feedback mechanisms were emphasized for adaptive planning and timely achievement of milestones, with a cost-benefit analysis to assess feasibility and resource allocation.

Detailed report from group works

Milestones and results until 2027

1. Pilot IT platform, database of qualifications, professions, vacancies, educational programs, courses, recognition centers.
2. Making a political decision by heads of state.
3. Memorandum, agreements between the governments of the Central Asian countries
4. Creation of a pool of experts, expert councils from countries.
5. Readiness of each country to finance the scenario.
6. Creation of crowdfunding, donor support.
7. Regional coordination body between countries. Cooperates with national bodies on NSC, carries out monitoring.

8. Draft Regional Qualifications Framework.
9. Roadmap, plan, strategy, indicators until 2035 and 2050.
10. Multi-country sectoral qualifications frameworks (pilots).
11. Multi-country sectoral occupational standards (pilots).
12. Multi-country educational standards and programs (pilots).
13. Automatic mutual recognition of qualification certificates in 5 sectors (pilot).
14. Successful partnership with business through regulatory documents, expert advice, involvement in qualification processes. Increasing their interest.
15. Ownership and responsibility by key players in the countries' national qualifications systems,
16. Annual forum of representatives of sectoral committees
17. Annual regional report on the NQs of the Central Asian countries
18. Regional centers for upskilling
19. Mechanisms, procedures, quality assurance standards.

Milestones and results until 2035

1. Amendments to country regulatory legal acts
2. Fully functional and updated IT portal
3. Stable composition and structure of partners of Central Asian countries
4. Recognition, full use and endorsement of the Regional Qualifications Framework (2031)
5. Recognition of multi-country qualifications
6. Classifier (analogue of ESCO) for Central Asia.
7. Inclusion of neighboring countries in the Regional Qualifications System of Central Asia.
8. CA regional forum on national qualifications systems
9. Center for monitoring and research of achieved results, external expert assessment
10. Effective functioning of the regional labor market

Milestones and results until 2050

1. Analytical review of work up to 2050 and recognition of the Central Asian Regional Qualifications Framework at the international level.
2. Professional recognition of educational institution diplomas in Central Asia.
3. Global leadership in qualifications. Sustainable regional qualifications system in CA.

5. **Exchange of information.** Stakeholders discussed how to make information (and what information) accessible and open, and related steps. They also discussed about the users and common data exchange protocols.

Summary

The group recommended developing **standardized data-sharing protocols and locating resources on an IT platform**. A common resource base was proposed to make relevant data accessible in **multiple languages** (including Russian, English, and the national languages of the participating countries) for professional users and beneficiaries.

The initial step involves creating a **centralized IT platform** that serves as a repository for crucial data related to professional qualifications. The data repository should encompass a wide range of information, including regulatory frameworks, labor market demands, educational standards, and best practices.

The implementation of the resource base should begin with the identification of essential data types to be included in the platform. Once the foundational data is established, the platform can be expanded to incorporate additional resources based on user feedback and evolving needs.

Establishing **clear protocols for data access and sharing** will address data security and privacy concerns. These protocols should outline the procedures for data submission, access rights, and communication between stakeholders. The platform should implement robust security measures to protect sensitive information and ensure that data sharing complies with regional and international regulations.

Detailed report from group works

How to make information accessible and open (resource base)?

- Creation of an online regional platform
 - o Proposal to utilise “ Enbek ” pages that already has a relevant structure- starting point incorporating courses, library etc,
 - o Proposal to utilise BMC consult pages
- Defining regional and national responsibilities for managing the platform,
- Starting by sharing national resources, then moving into connecting into interoperable databases with common architecture

- Creation of a working chat, social network channels
- Regular online and offline meetings of key partners/participants, seminars, round tables, study tours for familiarization, exchange of experience
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- exchange of new technologies by industry between countries, including maintaining and coordinating glossaries
- sending information (automatic sending from the platform)

Languages

Russian, English, national languages

What information

- regulatory and legal acts, qualification system instruments (NQF, SQF, professional and educational standards and others), register of professions, classifiers, quality assurance system, international metrics
- information about labor market needs
- enabling data collection, online questionnaires, research
- best practices, international experience
- courses
- linking the websites of ministries and departments to the regional platform
- linking to database of experts, professionals, employers/companies

Users and common data exchange protocols

all interested parties (project participants: ministries and departments, employers, educational institutions, educators, expert communities, the Chamber of Entrepreneurs, trade unions)

6. Principles and procedures. Stakeholders discussed general principles and procedures for enacting regional cooperation proposal

Summary

Participants outlined foundational principles for cooperation, including transparency, consistency, sustainability, and accountability. Key procedures involve a CA-wide political commitment through an agreement or memorandum, the establishment of a coordinating body, and the development of comprehensive guidelines and roadmaps. All decisions should consider national specificities while incorporating international best practices to ensure inclusivity and adaptability.

Detailed report from group works

1. Adoption of a political decision, Regulation on the Regional coordination body;
2. Development of concept and roadmap (link to milestones)
3. Adoption of Principles of:

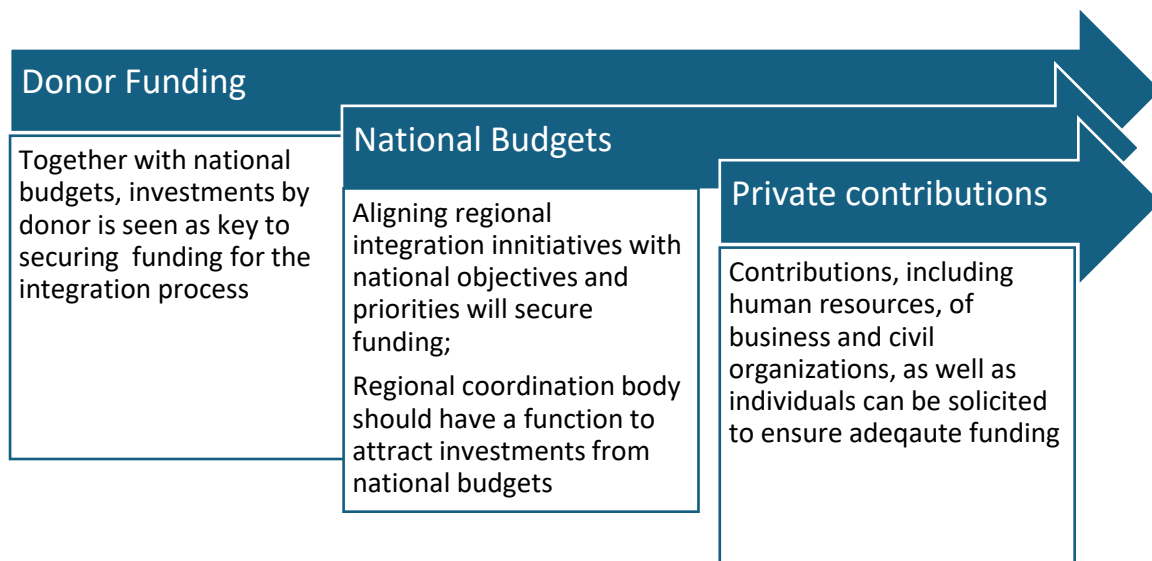
- Consistency and equality in decision making;
- Transparency;
- Sustainability;
- Implementation of decisions taken;
- Taking into account national characteristics and legislations;
- Availability of information to wider public, including employers;
- Accountability;
- Taking into account international experience, best practices.

7. Funding. Stakeholders discussed possible sources that can be used to finance regional cooperation activities, as well as synergies with already planned activities. They also focus on factors influencing decisions of national governments and donors to invest.

Summary

Potential funding sources include national budgets, donor organizations, and private sector investment, as per Diagram below. International financial institutions and various donor organizations, can play a crucial role by providing grants and loans tailored for development projects for the integration purposes. These contributions should be complemented by national budgets that allocate resources for local initiatives, emphasizing the importance of aligning regional efforts with national priorities. Private sector investment, including crowdfunding, was discussed as another significant source of funding, with private donors, businesses, associations and individuals pooling their resources to support the integration initiatives.

The importance of aligning regional cooperation efforts with existing national initiatives was highlighted as key to attract and secure investments in regional integration process.



Strategies to demonstrate the economic benefits of regional collaboration to CA governments and international donors and promoting successful project outcomes were recommended to secure sustained funding. Additionally, mitigating corruption risks and ensuring transparency in financial reporting are vital for establishing a stable investment climate. Lastly, creating tax incentives for investors and focusing on the development of green skills and eco-certification initiatives can further enhance the region's appeal.

Detailed report from group works

Sources of financing

- International financial institutions and donors (World Bank, EIB, EBRD , GIZ , etc.)
- State budget and government funds
- Private donors (major entrepreneurs, philanthropists, etc.)
- Non-governmental organizations (international, regional and national)
- Crowdfunding

Synergies

- The intergovernmental body will formulate requests for the national government on issues:: regional qualification framework, regional sectoral frameworks , labor mobility issues, visa free regime
- Engagement of the community of DARYA national and international experts, and further widening the network of experts

- When decisions are taken on financing of projects in Central Asia , a special focus on projects should be put on projects involving all five Central Asian countries

Attracting investments

There are different motivating factors for different investors, so their visibility/communication need to be reinforced:

- Improving the competitiveness of Central Asian countries
- Creating conditions for retaining qualified personnel in the region
- Positive results of previous projects , in particular the absence of corruption risks , transparency of financing and sustainability of projects
- Image of investor in the project
- Tax incentives for investors
- Development of green skills and eco-certification in the region .

8. Risks. Stakeholders discussed main risks/challenges for regional cooperation and possible mitigation actions

Summary

The main risks identified include political instability, funding limitations, and potential resistance to cross-border standardization. Other risks highlighted are difficulty in justifying and making policy decisions, lack of funding sources, instability and lack of continuity in implementing decisions, changing policy priorities, different levels of economic development and digitalization of countries in the region, lack of regional unified coordination, low level of awareness, shortage of qualified specialists, outflow of qualified specialists, workload of the attracted specialists and resulting poor-quality performance, inconsistency in the adoption of legal acts affecting education among CA countries, different level of qualifications.

Mitigation strategies include establishing strong governance frameworks, creating adaptable funding models, and promoting the economic advantages of a regional qualifications system to encourage buy-in from national stakeholders. The importance of regular risk assessments and flexible response strategies was emphasized to address unforeseen challenges.

Detailed report from group works

Risks

1. The difficulty of coordinating political decisions
2. Lack of funding sources
3. Instability and lack of continuity in the implementation of decisions taken or changes in policy priorities
4. Lack of regional unified coordination
5. Difficulties in recognizing all levels of qualifications from other countries
6. Low practical applicability of RQF, as countries might refer to their NQFs only
7. Different levels of digitalization (problems with Information systems' integration)
8. monitoring mechanisms
9. Low level of awareness at national levels
10. Low level of interinstitutional communications (at the regional level)
11. Lack of competent specialists that can implement decisions and objectives
12. Outflow of skilled personnel
13. Different levels of development of the NQS (development of OS, SQFs, low involvement of partners ...)
14. Different levels of economic development
15. Transparency of information
16. Poor implementation of assigned tasks due to the workload of the specialists involved
17. Disregard (failure to accept) the accumulated experience of other countries
18. Failure to implement decisions in a timely manner
19. Inconsistency in the adoption of regulatory legal acts that affect regional cooperation
20. Cataclysms, pandemic ...

Proposals for mitigation

1. Establishment of a support fund and attraction of international donors
2. Reinforcing capacities of specialists
3. Developing mechanisms to motivate engagement of business
4. Unified risk classifier, possible ways to eliminate them
5. Quarterly meeting in NQS bodies